# The Little Lion and The Sage at Monticello: An Examination of Economic Debate and How the Personal Influenced the Political

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In June of 1784, Thomas Jefferson briefly visited New York City, lodging at 19 Maiden Lane within a boardinghouse belonging to a Dorothy Elsworth.[1] Six years later and after a lengthy stay in Paris as the Minister to France, he once more found himself on Maiden Lane, feeling the pressing heat of a New York June. It was the 20th of June, 1790: a Sunday. This time the home was his own at 57 Maiden Lane, and the mood was rather somber when compared to six years earlier. In 1784 he had the good fortune of looking ahead to the sophistication of French society that awaited him on the other side of his voyage across the Atlantic. This time, however, all he had was a throbbing headache and the impending reality that if a proper deal were not struck, and quickly too, that the young United States may very well dissolve after only a few short years of independence. Despite his headache, which had yet to subside for nearly a month, Jefferson had arranged a dinner with one of his closest political allies, James Madison, and with his greatest political foe,

[1] Jefferson's Memorandum Book entry for June 5, 1784. Bear, James A. Jr., and Lucia C. Stanton, eds. *Jefferson's Memorandum Books: Accounts, with Legal Records and Miscellany, 1767-1826* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Alexander Hamilton.

The three men convened to engage in a tenuous but necessary discussion on the nation's economy, specifically on Hamilton's recent attempts to pass his policy of debt assumption. Hamilton possessed the extraordinary gift of being a perpetual thorn in the side of Jefferson's political agenda, plaguing the Secretary of State like that set of chronic headaches. As the three founders concluded their meal and their small talk, they commenced serious negotiations on the assumption policy, to which both Jefferson and Madison had been vocal opponents of. After great discussion, Madison pledged to suspend his active opposition to the policy, proclaiming that "he would not vote for it, nor entirely withdraw his opposition . . . but leave it to its fate." In return, Hamilton was to make a concession of his own. With the political backing of the Federalist party, Hamilton agreed to wield his impressive influence in Congress to appease Madison and Jefferson's southern allies. It was decided that a rather massive concession needed to be made, as all three men understood that "the pill would be a bitter one to the Southern states," who had little to gain from the policy.

Ultimately the decision made at the dinner table on that Sunday evening at 57 Maiden Lane was so massive that it not only enticed enough members of Congress to vote favorably for Hamilton's debt assumption, but it would also alter the face of American politics for centuries to come. Jefferson later wrote of the decision to appease the southern states as an attempt to "soothe them" with "the removal of the seat of government to the Potowmac." This measure, shifting the nation's capitol from its original location in Philadelphia to its famous location in Washington D.C. symbolically and literally removed the capitol from the firm grip of northern influence. It also revealed the immense power and influence wielded by the three individuals who dined in Jefferson's New York home that evening: three men from two opposing parties who could relocate a nation's capitol over a meal. What it was not telling of, however was of the fierce opposition that Jefferson and Hamilton

had, and how each man's political clout was routinely and savagely brandished toward the other.[2]

When prompted to search for an early republic illustration of political friction, historians often turn to the rivalry between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. Their tale is one that continues to ignite the interest of scholars, even though it existed well over 200 years into the past. Terminated with Hamilton's death in 1804 at the hands of Jefferson's own vice president, Aaron Burr, the feud that had carried on for nearly 14 years would maintain a lasting influence on American politics for centuries to come. Hamilton, the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury and undisputedly the most vocal member of the Federalist party, is most often associated with his vision of a commercially-attuned America. Both Hamilton and his vision for the nation's future would find firm opposition in the Secretary of State, and later President, Thomas Jefferson. A leader of the Democratic-Republican party that would coalesce during the 1790s, Jefferson regularly exchanged political and personal jabs with Hamilton. It appeared that Hamilton's every political move was met with opposition from Jefferson, a political behemoth who was determined to champion his own individualistic and agrarian vision for the nation.

The tale of this intriguing rivalry is recalled by many prominent politicians who either fashion themselves as "Jeffersonian" or "Hamiltonian." Indeed, as the names suggest, the visions for the American future that these two men fought over would prevail far beyond their deaths. Their influence would far exceed their own days, extending them well into the modern day as fountains of guidance and reason for those seeking to follow one visionary path or the other. It has never been uncommon to look toward the past for insight into the future, and the rivalry between Jefferson and Hamilton continues to define popular political understanding regarding the deep-seated nature

[2]Account and all Jefferson quotes from Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000) 48-49.

of partisanship. The enmity of the two founding fathers is at times likened to current political factionalism, especially given their high station within the opposing Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties. This intense warring of political factions would eventually culminate in the presidential election of 1800, which is considered a battle between two of the most libelous presidential campaigns ever launched. Jefferson's campaign fired at Federalist candidate John Adams by accusing him of possessing a "hideous hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman."[3] Not to be outdone, Adams fired back with his own jab, calling Jefferson "a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father."[4] On the ferocity of the entire affair, Jefferson wrote "The storm through which we have passed, has been tremendous indeed."[5] Although the disagreements between Jefferson and Hamilton never grew to be as heated as the slander issued during the election of 1800, a fairly great amount of animosity was exchanged between them. Partisanship, by 1800, was very much alive and well, owing much of its good health to the energies of Jefferson and Hamilton.

Indeed modern-day writers such as Ron Chernow, the author of the 2004 biography *Alexander Hamilton*, would actually credit the rivalry between Jefferson and Hamilton as one "so fierce that it would *spawn* the two-party system in America."[6] It would become the first of the many following factionalisms that James Madison had so vehemently opposed in the Federalist

[3]James Calendar, quoted in Stephen Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1996), 65.

[4]Thomas Robinson Hazard, *The Jonny-cake Papers of "Shepherd Tom" Together with Reminiscences of Narragansett Schools of Former Days*, (Boston: Printed for the subscribers, 1915), 232-233.

[5]Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to John Dickinson" (March 6, 1801), quoted in James F. Simon, *What Kind of Nation: Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall and the Epic Struggle to Create the United States*, (New York: Simon Schuster, 2002), 145.

[6]Ron Chernow, "The Best of Enemies," *Time Magazine*, July 5, 2004. 72. Italics are mine.

Papers. A political split that would prevail into current-day politics was being solidified with each public and private blow issued by these dueling icons, indicating that political factions received more influence from the rivalry than they appeared to contribute. Jefferson, elected to the presidency in 1800, would include a number of Federalists in his cabinet despite the volatile and ruinous nature of the campaign launched against him by John Adams and the Federalist Party. This intriguing lack of partisan politics in Jefferson's political practice indicates that his disdain for Hamilton and his policies extended far deeper than the surface of party lines could reveal.

Jefferson himself would hint that in his own perspective Hamilton was an entity unto himself; to Jefferson he existed entirely separate from other Federalists. Carried over from his station in office, Jefferson's curious distance from the partisanship that is so closely associated with this rivalry found expression as much in his personal writings as it did in public practice. In *The Anas* Thomas Jefferson reveals that after a discussion of great length between himself, Adams, and Hamilton, he had reached the conclusion that despite their equal allegiance to the Federalist cause, Adams and Hamilton were men who existed on opposite sides of the "exact line which separated . . . political creeds."[7] An important distinction between the man and the political party is thus established, hinting that one of the nation's most divisive and influential political hostilities had been fueled by more than public politics - it had been shaded by a great deal of personal contempt.

The very matter that provided the first public glimpses of this rivalry occurred during the distinct solidification of the Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties: the implementation of Hamilton's economic plan. Recently ascended to the role of the Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton proposed to Congress in 1790 that the federal government institute a policy of assumption which would relieve the burden of debt on the states and pay

[7]Thomas Jefferson, "The Anas," in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Random House, 2004), 117.

out in full the face value of securities issued during the Revolutionary War. To further solve the economic crisis that the new nation was facing, Hamilton made additional suggestions for the establishment of a federally minted currency and a national bank with which to stabilize the repaired economy. The matter became a point of particularly aggressive disagreement from Jefferson, who dedicated a great deal of his political effort to publicly oppose Hamilton's measures.

Writing at length about the differences and similarities between the two warring founders in his book *Jefferson and Hamilton: The Rivalry that Forged a Nation*, author John Ferling points toward their incompatible visions for the future of America as the crux of their dispute. Assuming that all areas of their disagreement are influenced equally by the same factors, Ferling paints a portrait of both Jefferson and Hamilton heavily invested in preserving a lasting legacy through the nation's future, which would either be a realization of the agrarian or commercial vision. These visions clashed on a philosophical front, influenced deeply by each man's convictions regarding democracy, the rights of the individual, and public dissent. Wrapped up in these conflicting futures is the dispute over Hamilton's economic policies, which Ferling attributes to the same basis for the rest of their disagreement: fundamentally discordant beliefs in "the depth and breadth of government intrusiveness."[8]

Given the high political station each man occupied, the rivalry between Jefferson and Hamilton is often handled as an entirely public affair. Built up over centuries, these two American visionaries have become defined less by their rivalry as people and more on the basis of clashing potential ideological outcomes for the American future. These historical projections often neglect to take into account one largely important defining characteristic about these American paragons - the fact that they are, simply put, merely

[8]John Ferling, *Jefferson and Hamilton: The Rivalry that Forged a Nation* (New York: Bloombury Press, 2013), X.

human. Though these founders were of an indisputably impressive intellect, they were not immune to the pettiness of politics, nor did their political ideologies exist in a vacuum, devoid of their own personal prejudices and squabbles. While the public aspects of the rivalry certainly cannot be ignored, neither can its immense personal investments. Jefferson's aggressive opposition may have found its expression in the highly-publicized political sphere, but its roots extended into deeply personal aspects of Jefferson's life that invoked concern and wariness. Due to its multifaceted nature, the topic of Jefferson's immense opposition to Hamilton's early economic policies is one that I wish to explore. The examination that follows is the brief synthesis and analysis of biographies, private letters, public speeches, and other publications from Jefferson and Hamilton themselves. A fully cohesive examination of the deeply personal aspects of their economic dispute remains pending, but the following pages introduce the great many factors extending far beyond a single source of political discord that contributed to the fierce animosity brought to the table on Hamilton's economic policy.

By the time Hamilton took his position as the Secretary of the Treasury, America was no stranger to disputes regarding the expenditure of funds and the treatment of debts. As the American people were cementing themselves ideologically and geopolitically as a nation mere years earlier, it was simultaneously fighting a war against British forces while it waged its own series of internal political and economic battles. With the accumulating debt and quickly mounting financial pressure, the young nation was operating under the impotent Articles of Confederation, which granted no control over national economic policy to the federal legislature. Indeed, the fledgeling United States was suffering from an acute lack of national economic policy. The stability of legal tender itself was all but held in disarray and counterfeiting was both common and widespread. America's economy was nearly defunct, spiraling out of control in the wake of a costly war that had strained the financial resources of the states themselves. Congress had neither the legal

authority nor the infrastructure to create economic stability. Wholly without the legal ability to declare any currency as official tender, the powers of the Continental Congress only extended as far as its influence. Able only to *recommend* that the states adopt a uniform currency, Congress was fighting an uphill battle against states that were reluctant to consolidate power within an entity that even vaguely reminded them of a monarchy.

As a result of this endemic instability of currency, inflation during the war skyrocketed, reaching unprecedented levels. By 1781, $100 of paper currency was required to purchase only $1 worth of silver.[9] The new nation was on the brink of financial collapse, and solutions were desperately being sought. When Washington named Hamilton as the Secretary of the Treasury in 1790, the economy was in poor shape. States were bowing under the pressures of wartime debts and individuals were desperately trading government securities to pay for food; the incipient nation was facing formidable problems that required immediate solutions. The immense task was given to the new Treasury Secretary, who drew heavily on his experience with the Bank of New York a few years prior. In 1790, Hamilton presented his First Report on the Public Credit to the new U.S. Congress, calling on the federal government to take ownership and action with the nation's economy. His reports to Congress outlined the necessity to and the means through which the federal government would assume the debts of each state, pay back government securities at their full face value, and establish a national bank to regulate unstable currency. As much as Hamilton's proposal elicited support from Americans eager for a stronger economy, it brought out an equally powerful opposing force that was championed by one of Hamilton's own fellow cabinet members: Thomas Jefferson.

Absent from the country for the four years of turmoil prior to Hamilton's report, Jefferson returned from his long trip to France in 1790. After suc-

[9]Harry Carman and Harold C. Syrett, *A History of the American People*, (New York: Columbia, 1956), 160.

ceeding Benjamin Franklin as the Minister to France, Jefferson frequently expressed his malaise with the political tone of the nation to which he was finally returning. Writing later of his return, Jefferson would lament that he had been "but a stranger to the ground, a stranger to the actors on it, so long absent as to have lost all familiarity with the subject."[10] Given that he had been far removed from the political machinery of the nation, Jefferson wished to excuse himself from "the most bitter and angry contest ever known in Congress, before or since the Union of the States."[11] Encountering a frantic Hamilton while on a stroll in the midst of the savage congressional division, Jefferson engaged in a discussion with the young Treasury Secretary regarding the current state of affairs. According to Jefferson, Hamilton "painted pathetically" the condition of the legislature, describing a Congress so divided that the separation of the states appeared to be an impending reality.[12] Jefferson once more professed his distance from the subject, proclaiming: "I was really a stranger of the whole subject . . . not having yet informed myself of the system of finances adopted, I knew not how far this [dissolution of states] was a necessary sequence."[13] Sheltering himself from the political storm, Jefferson thus relinquished any obligation to be invested in the legislative disarray that had arisen over Hamilton's introduction of legislation. It would not take him long, however, to form a strong opinion on the state of economic affairs and political life in the United States. By the time that Jefferson wrote about Hamilton's economic policies in the years to follow, his descriptions had become tainted with deeply-held scorn and contempt. He would readily paint Hamilton as the head of a despotic political machine, driven by avarice and malice for the American people. This transformation would be influenced deeply by Jefferson's personal experience

[10]Jefferson, "The Anas," in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Random House, 2004), 114.

[11]Jefferson, "The Anas," in Penden, *The Life and Selected Writings*, 114.

[12]Ibid., 115.

[13]Ibid., 115-116.

with Hamilton as a member of his political cohort.

As an equally prominent politician and a fellow member of George Washington's cabinet, Hamilton was, first of all, a worthy foe. Jefferson was never one to shy away from admitting when he was in the presence of intellect, and he wholeheartedly believed in a "natural aristocracy among men" rooted in "the grounds of . . . virtue and talents."[14] High in Jefferson's natural aristocracy were those who had earned their position by merit, typically through cultivating a keen intellect and using the distinctly powerful gift of reason to raise oneself out of the depths of obscurity. Hamilton's exceptional prowess of intellectual and political pursuits had grown exponentially since his humble beginnings as a precocious young boy in the Caribbean, and Jefferson recognized that his meteoric rise was a product of his sharp wit, which elevated him to a position of great influence within the nation. Jefferson had, however, reason for concern with Hamilton as his intellectual match. In a letter penned to James Madison, Jefferson's description of his rival is quite telling of this truth: "Hamilton is really a Colossus to the anti-republican party. When he comes forward, there is nobody but yourself who can meet him."[15] As much as Hamilton's political cunning may have impressed Jefferson, Hamilton's staunch position on the other end of the political spectrum did more harm than good for Jefferson's respect of him.

An outspoken citizen and a prolific author, Hamilton appeared to be, in many ways, Jefferson's equal. As a politician, Hamilton was capable of orchestrating political changes on a massive scale, navigating through the Constitution that he had advocated for and assisted in crafting. He was compelling - a proud orator - and he held his beliefs and opinions steadfast against the tides of opposition that public office promised to bring. Equally fervent in his own beliefs, Jefferson was like Hamilton in nearly as many

[14]Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to John Adams," October 28, 1813.

[15]Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to James Madison, (September 21, 1795), in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Andrew W. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh (Washington DC: 1903), 310.

capacities as he was different. He too was headstrong, dedicated, and well-read; Jefferson prided himself on his intellect and spent many of his years ruminating on philosophical notions such as the natures of man, religion, and politics. Though he was often described as quiet and of a reserved nature, Jefferson never shrank away from asserting himself through the written word in manners he was never recorded doing in person. Both Jefferson and Hamilton issued polemics against each other as men and as politicians, employing heated language and insinuating outrageous claims against each other to prove their points. As Jefferson launched attacks and counterattacks against his recently-forged rival, he must have felt his competitive spirit awakened by the prospect of having an equally-intelligent enemy with which to exchange blows. Finally encountering a political rival who was worth his salt, Jefferson was able to engage in a political debate that was as cerebral and philosophical as it was ferocious and brutal. The ongoing feud, which forced each man to dig deep within his own knowledge and reason to defend his position, was certainly a point of intellectual stimulus: an invigorating exercise of wit and acumen that Jefferson took great relish in.

Given the political vacuum created in the nation's recent break from colonial rule, the public repartee between Hamilton and Jefferson became quickly engrossed in the wider political struggle for influence and credibility. As Hamilton rose to prominence, he also represented a growing potential threat to Jefferson's own carefully-cultivated political standing. Jefferson, for a while removed from continental politics, considered Hamilton's rise to power as a direct challenge to his own political future. Indeed, there was much for Jefferson to find concern with. The Treasury Secretary, twelve years younger than Jefferson, had risen quickly through the political ranks first as a soldier, then as George Washington's aid-de-camp, then a delegate from New York to the Constitutional Convention, to his eventual post as the Secretary of the Untied States Treasury. He was charismatic, young, charming, and most of all, visible. Jefferson had been out of the public's eye for a

few years, serving as the Minister to France and thus remaining thoroughly removed from most of America's domestic affairs during those years.

When Jefferson returned to the United States in the late eighteenth century, his homecoming was not one blanketed in sweeping applause and widespread admiration from the public. His return was rather humble, perfectly fit for a man not yet endowed with the connotation of greatness. Just as the American public of 1790 had not lionized Jefferson as a national effigy, neither would Hamilton have looked toward him with the reverence of modern-day Americans. Given Hamilton's own achievements, he had no motivation to hold Jefferson in higher esteem than he held himself. Heavily invested in domestic politics, Hamilton had blossomed from a precocious illegitimate child from a small Caribbean island to the Secretary of the Treasury in a few short decades. He had fought in the Revolutionary War against the British, rose to prominence in the politics of New York, and had written extensively on the merits of a constitutional government, tirelessly working behind his pen to convince the young state governments to ratify the new Constitution. Hamilton, now faced with his largest challenge yet, had been granted the hopes of the nation in solving the crippling economic crisis. The young founder had cause for arrogance, and he was not shy for exhibiting it.

Jefferson, though a worthy contributor to politics in his home state, a member of the Second Continental Congress, and the author of the Declaration of Independence, would not have appeared so large of a figure in Hamilton's eyes. When he left for North America many years prior, Jefferson was struggling with the loss of his beloved wife Martha. He found reprieve in his extended visit to France, which provided him with the necessary time for emotional convalescence. The trip had also effectively removed him from the watchful eye of the American public. Jefferson had participated in politics well before his departure from the continent, but lacked the visibility that his Federalist counterpart possessed. Even Jefferson's political contributions may have appeared less impressive to Hamilton who was

relatively young and, living in New York at the time, primarily unconcerned with Virginia legislation of previous decades.[16] These highly personal influences would bleed over into the political atmosphere between the two men as Hamilton's quick rise to prominence and his lack of reverence for Jefferson contributed to a widening chasm that would quickly become a point of serious contention. Observing the growing rift between the two members of his cabinet, George Washington observed that "Mr. Jefferson fears in Mr. Hamilton a formidable rival in the competition for the presidential chair at a future period."[17]

In the sense that Hamilton posed a young yet remarkable threat to Jefferson's political future, Washington was correct. The disconnect that they had begun to establish would persist beyond their pasts or present and into their visions of the future that laid ahead of them and the nation. Thomas Jefferson is widely known for his romantic ideal of a nation populated by the idyllic yeoman farmer. It was an outgrowth of Jefferson's fondness for self-determination that he hoped would pervade every layer of social and economic standing. Jefferson's future was truly a vision of the unlimited independence he hoped would extend from the highest reaches of the American intellectual elite down to the laboring artisans of the north and the honest farmers of his Virginian roots in the south. Hamilton, by contrast, favored a vision of the future that incorporated trade and commerce into the American fabric. He predicted that a flourishing economy, complete with a multitude of international economic connections, would ensure the prosperity and health of the nation that he and Jefferson both fought so hard to solidify. These irreconcilable visions for the future would become one of Jefferson and Hamilton's most remembered battlegrounds, but it would be an expression rather than a cause of the deep-seated incompatibility between the two founders.

Jefferson, believing in the purity of a nation built by yeoman farmers,

[16]Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton.* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 313.
[17]George Washington, quote from Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 323.

speculated that the continent possessed "lands enough to employ an infinite number of people in their cultivation."[18] He found the innocent farmer a vision of "the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous" American possible, imagining for the nation the potential for an idyllic and peaceful future.[19] Jefferson found fault in the commercialism endemic to Hamilton's vision for the future, which he frequently derided as cold and corrupt. Built upon the yeoman farmers who Jefferson understood as "the most valuable citizens," a Jeffersonian future envisioned a nation constructed by active citizens who would be "tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds."[20] A vision to which he held steadfast, Jefferson and his American future were firmly rooted in the independence of the individual. While Hamilton's commercial America left ample room for the infringement of an unhindered independent yeoman farmer, there was a great deal more of Hamilton's vision that Jefferson would find fault in.

While cementing his own persevering world-view, Hamilton had taken the time to examine at great length, the trends of the British economy. This strategy, while potentially useful in preparation for the growing reality of an industrial America, also elicited a fair amount of concern from Americans who desired as much distance from the British empire as possible. Britain had long since begun the practice of industrialization and the country was in a state of social flux, undergoing the transformations that accompany a quickly morphing economy and society. The trend did not show any signs of slowing, and Americans like Jefferson looked on with abject horror at the travesties that growing industry had inflicted upon the working class. In England, many rural citizens were forced to abandon the practice of farming to seek work in the cities, their agricultural prospects limited by the increasingly restrictive enclosure movement. The deficiencies of the British model,

[18]Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to John Jay" (August 23, 1785), in *The Declaration of Independence and Letters*, ed. Richard S. Poppen, St. Louis: 1904

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

coupled with the expansive anti-British sentiment that pervaded the freshly independent United States, contributed to a deepening opposition to Hamilton's policies.

Yet even as his opponents feared that Hamilton's own economic policies would plunge many American citizens into the poverty of their British counterparts, Hamilton did not see the fate of America as a prophecy set in stone. America's economic future, even if it was built upon the triumphs and failures of the British model, was not tied entirely to the British path. In Hamilton's eyes the future of the two economies would remain entirely separate if America's fragile economy was handled properly. In his Report on a National Bank, issued in late 1790, Hamilton professed the basis for his American vision when he described that if "Industry is increased, commodities are multiplied, agriculture and manufactures flourish: and herein consists the true wealth and prosperity of a state."[21] Jefferson's yeoman farmer would not, by Hamilton's prediction, suffer the economic injustices of British citizens who had been trapped by circumstance in a well of poverty. Yet even when striving toward the same goal of national prosperity as Hamilton was, Jefferson did not support Hamilton's pro-industrial policies as a foothold toward that end. The "class of artificers and the panderers of vice" that Jefferson equated with an industrial society were, in his eyes, "the instruments by which the liberties of a country are generally overturned."[22] Although the newly-formed union was quite dissimilar to pre-industrial Britain, Jefferson condemned the imminent reality of industry, dismissing it as an engine for the corruption of the nation.

It should be noted that no matter however much Jefferson might have found contention with Hamilton over these clashing agrarian and industrial foresights, his disdain appears to be directed more toward Hamilton than toward his economic forecast. During 1790, in the very midst of Hamilton's

[21] Alexander Hamilton, "Report on a National Bank," December 13, 1790

[22] Jefferson, "Letter to Jay"

efforts to change the tide of the flailing American economy, Jefferson records his admiration and agreement for the capitalist system in his exclamation: "I think [Adam] Smith's *Wealth of Nations* to be the best book extant."[23] Jefferson's exuberance for a book that advocated for the harsh realities of a free market capitalist society hardly matched his expressions of distrust for Hamilton's policies, which he had condemned for their lack of protection for the average citizen. Part of Smith's appeal may have existed in the promise of independence that was inherent in an un-regulated free market economy. Jefferson was an eager supporter of individual liberties in the economy, and his praise of Smith's work suggests that he was in favor of those who maneuvered their way to economic prosperity through their use of reason and intellect, merits that Jefferson repeatedly bestowed his high praise upon. This passionate support of unfettered success within a capitalist system, what could be termed today a sort of economic darwinism, wavered when he encountered Hamilton's economic policies. With the release of Hamilton's plan to pay back federal securities at their full face value Jefferson would rebel against the policy. Jefferson suddenly dismissed speculators who had used their wits to further themselves economically as unscrupulous while he denigrated Hamilton for utilizing his own policy to reward his disciples. It appears that the source of Jefferson's opposition lay not with the policies themselves, but rather with Hamilton. Jefferson wrote of his foe:

> "Hamilton was indeed a singular character. Of acute understanding, disinterested, and honorable in all private transactions, amiable in society, and duly valuing virtue in private life, yet so bewitched and perverted by the British example, as to be under thoro' conviction that corruption was essential to the government of a nation"[24]

[23]Thomas Jefferson, quote from Wish, Harvey. *Society and Thought in Early America.* (New York: 1950), 200.

[24]Thomas Jefferson, quote from Burnstein, ML. *Understanding Thomas Jefferson: Studies in Economics, Law, and Philosophy.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 39.

While Jefferson would be one of the first to accuse Hamilton of being too married to the British example, he would certainly not be the last. Historians have since followed in Jefferson's footsteps, accusing Hamilton of seeking "to plant the British system in America, corruption and all."[25] This transplantation of British economics was worrisome to Jefferson. The Revolutionary War had been fought only a short time prior, and the fledgeling nation was still reeling from the effects of such a sudden break with the British Empire. The economy Hamilton was attempting to repair was one area of American society that had sustained particularly heavy damage during the Revolutionary War. In addition to his economic beliefs, Hamilton's political views served as ammunition for his opponents. Accusals of Hamilton's affection for British politics aroused cries of monarchism, and Jefferson charged him with holding a political position that was "a compromise between the two parties of royalism and republicanism."[26] Although finally possessing its own government, America had not yet abandoned its fears of being once more subjugated to the whim of a crown. Still new and without precedent, the American government was in competition with monarchist rule to prove itself a superior form of government. Jefferson saw Hamilton's attempts to consolidate power within the hands of the federal government as intentional malice toward individuals of the republic, believing that he was scheming to uphold the system of monarchy that threatened to prevail. The British system of politics and of government appeared perverse to Jefferson, and he routinely expressed his disgust for Hamilton's policies, citing their purpose as the eventual degeneration of America.

In establishing a functioning economic system that would solve the economic crisis, Hamilton appears to have borrowed from the examples established by the long-serving British Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole, particularly those of the Bank of England and the sinking fund, or borrowing

[25]Forrest McDonald, quote from Burnstein, *Understanding Thomas Jefferson*, 40.
[26]Jefferson, "The Anas," in Penden, *The Life and Selected Writings*, 112.

on bonds, as a solution to the instability of the early republic's economy.[27] Where Walpole solved the mounting economic crisis facing Britain, Hamilton hoped to do the same. Many years after Hamilton's economic policy was first introduced, Jefferson expressed disdain for Walpole's role in Britain, crediting him as the source which "gave the [British] constitution that direction which its defect permitted."[28] He revealed his bias against Walpole, proclaiming that due to his political presence "morality had been expunged from [the British] political code."[29] Jefferson no doubt feared that Hamilton, if he were truly seeking to emulate Walpole's likeness, would also lay waste to the precious Constitution of the United States.

Through Jefferson's personal writings, one quickly senses that to him Hamilton was a figure in relentless pursuit of corroding the Constitution. Jefferson did not appear swayed by Hamilton's devotion to the document which he had proved instrumental in convincing the states to ratify. With his vision obscured by Hamilton's British influence, Jefferson believed himself to be championing the cause against the man whom he viewed as the greatest threat to the prosperity of the union. With his own political objective "to preserve the legislature pure and independent of the executive, [and] to restrain the administration to republican forms and principles," Jefferson represented his rival as the direct opposite.[30] The end result was that Jefferson had fashioned himself into a protector of the document and he would "not permit the Constitution to be construed into monarchy, and to be warped, in practice, into all the principles and pollutions of [the] favorite English model" that he equated Hamilton with.[31] Jefferson admitted: "here then was the real ground of the opposition which was made to the course of [Hamilton's]

[27]Burnstein, *Understanding Thomas Jefferson*, 40-41.

[28]Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to James Ronaldson on December 3, 1810," in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 4, ed. Henry Augustine Washington (Washington DC: 1853), 554.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Jefferson, "The Anas" in Penden, *The Life and Selected Writings*, 116.

[31]Ibid.

administration."[32]

Jefferson, fancying himself as the leader of the last bastion against British influence and the sole upholder of the unadulterated Constitution, found Hamilton as the perfect figure to vilify for encroaching political injustice. He portrayed Hamilton as a distilled version of the terrible wrongs of British society, thus creating his own vision of a man with all of the faults that Jefferson despised for the American nation. Jefferson found his disagreement with Hamilton on the basis of economics inseparable from his disdain for Hamilton's politics. Attributing both of these aspects of the Treasury Secretary to British influence made for a powerful figure at which to channel his hatred. It is difficult to doubt that a portion of Jefferson's disdain for Hamilton came from his distaste for the British, a distaste that Hamilton was acutely aware of. In a personal letter, Hamilton wielded his gift for issuing biting jabs, lambasting Jefferson and Madison with his own shrewd description: "They have a womanish attachment to France and a womanish resentment of Great Britain."[33]

Despite the ferocity of these exchanges, it is true that Hamilton favored a more controlled form of government, although perhaps not to the degree that Jefferson might have interpreted. Fearful that if the individuals might gain too much power then the nation would fall to disarray and chaos, Hamilton advocated for order through law. In the Federalist Papers, Hamilton expressed his argument for the necessity of government when he observed, "Why has government been instituted at all? Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without constraint."[34] Hamilton's desire for a government capable of restraining its constituents was born out of his own fears that the union and its precious new Constitution would corrode, rendering useless all of his efforts in fighting for both. He was fighting a battle toward the very same end that his opponent, Jefferson

[32]Ibid.

[33]Alexander Hamilton, "Letter to Edward Carrington," (May 26, 1792)

[34]Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 15," The Federalist Papers

was waging his own crusade for: a preservation of the nation. The two men saw eye to eye on little else, particularly on how that end might be achieved. Where Hamilton viewed a strong federal government as capable of defending itself against corruption, Jefferson saw a powerful and nefarious government ready to strike down its own citizens at will. This intention of federal imposition that is often cast on Hamilton policies, derives its malicious reputation more from the political atmosphere of its day than from Hamilton's intent. In fact, Hamilton's strong government served an entirely different purpose in his plans for America. Within the Federalist Papers, Hamilton professed his fervent belief that "the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government," proving instrumental in "the protection of the community against foreign attacks," in the "steady administration of the laws," and most importantly as "the security of liberty against the enterprises and assaults of ambition, of faction, and of anarchy."[35]

Hamilton mused at great length over the nature of politics and man, and some of the conclusions that he reached disconcerted Jefferson. In one of his earliest published works, *The Farmer Refuted*, Hamilton enumerated that "a fondness for power is implanted, in most men, and it is natural to abuse it, when acquired."[36] Statements such as this one concerned Jefferson, who not only viewed Hamilton as a man making a desperate grab for political power but also one of complete amorality and utter depravity. Declaring that "Hamilton was not only a monarchist, but for a monarchy bottomed on corruption," Jefferson viewed Hamilton as a source of the corruption that threatened to poison the well of American politics.[37] For all of Hamilton's deliberation on man and government, Jefferson routinely overlooks the concern that his rival possesses for the prevalence of corruption in society. Hamilton seldom remained quiet on the matter, and he often decried that "a dangerous ambition more often lurks behind the specious mask of zeal for the rights

[35]Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 69," The Federalist Papers
[36]Alexander Hamilton, The Farmer Refuted, 1775
[37]Jefferson, "The Anas," in Penden, *The Life and Selected Writings*, 117.

of the people than under the forbidding appearance of zeal for the firmness and efficiency of the government."[38] Ironically, both Jefferson and Hamilton would have found agreement with these words, each fancying himself the latter and his rival as the former.

Similar quotes would shade Hamilton as not only a dangerous Federalist to Jefferson, but as a corrupt politician who favored the unscrupulous in his policies. Hamilton's assumption policy was a source of particularly suspicious motive for his opponents. Jefferson accused Hamilton of using the policy to garner political support for himself and possibly, as Washington suggested, to impede Jefferson's opportunity to someday become president. After carefully maneuvering the various interests of Congress and rallying support from both the northern and southern states, Jefferson watched with exasperation as the Assumption was passed. He would later lament that the twenty million dollars approved by Congress was to be "divided among favored States, and thrown in as a pabulum to the stock-jobbing herd."[39] These 'favored states' did not include Virginia, Jefferson's home state, and this exclusion no doubt carried with it a great deal of sting. At the same time, Jefferson worried that the policy of assumption "added to the number of votaries to the Treasury, and made its chief the master of every vote in the legislature," giving rise to the concern that this fact "might give to the government the direction suited to [Hamilton's] political views."[40]

The stakes were rising for Jefferson, a man who not only saw his political potential being limited by this sudden foe but also the future of the nation endangered. He worried that Hamilton was using his position to help speculators who had purchased the nation's security bonds for a fraction of their face value when struggling bond holders became cornered by poverty and circumstance. Jefferson sympathized with the men who had sold their securities in desperation, acknowledging that "during the war the greatest

[38]Alexander Hamilton, quote from Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 253.
[39]Jefferson, "The Anas" in Penden, *The Life and Selected Writings*, 115-116.
[40]Ibid., 115-116.

difficulty we encountered was the want of money or means to pay our soldiers . . . our farmers, manufacturers, and merchants."[41] Wanting to track down the original bond holders, Jefferson attempted to channel funds to the poor and needy. Acknowledging that while it would have been ideal, Hamilton understood that without proper receipts of sale it would be impractical if not utterly impossible to track down the original holder of each and every security, especially given the amount of time that had passed since they were issued. Instead opting for the only route possible, which was to pay current security holders for the face value of each bond, Hamilton was forced to make the unpopular choice. This did not bode well for his reputation with Jefferson, who decried that he had played an important role in allowing "immense sums [to be] filched from the poor and ignorant."[42] Because some speculators had profited handsomely from the policy, which was unfavorable to many of Jefferson's yeoman farmers, he accused Hamilton of using the Assumption to gain political favor, claiming that "men thus enriched by the dexterity of a leader would follow of course the chief who was leading them to fortune, and become the zealous instruments of all his enterprises."[43]

Jefferson continued to berate Hamilton for his policy, this time attacking the principle of borrowing to pay the securities. Similar to the payment of bonds, Hamilton's policy of willingly creating a deficit to stimulate the economy was vilified by Jefferson, who exclaimed that "the more debt Hamilton could rake up, the more plunder [there was] for his mercenaries."[44] Jefferson also accused Hamilton of stealing from the funds provided by Congress, explicitly stating that Hamilton "pretended" to spend money that he claimed was "for general purposes and ought therefore to be paid from the general purse."[45] Jefferson at times keenly misinterprets his rival, perhaps assuming

[41]Ibid.,113.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Ibid., 114.
[45]Ibid.

that Hamilton was speaking of himself when he made statements about the influence of self-interest. Jefferson accused Hamilton of advocating for the Assumption under the guise of self-interest, of exhibiting his favor for speculators by refusing to track down the original owners of each security, and of effectively buying his power and prestige through his reward of corrupt speculators.

To Jefferson, corruption could be scourged from politics with enough dedication and careful action. In Hamilton's eyes, such hope for political purity was little more than an ivory tower. Hamilton believed that such an ideological utopia was unattainable given the inherent vice of humanity that was self-interest. Operating under this assumption it can be gleaned that if Jefferson were an idealist, then Hamilton was a pragmatist. Hamilton's own words on the nature of speculators and other men driven by greed and avarice reveal a pained disappointment at the realities of man and his relationship to wealth:

> "As riches increase and accumulate in few hands, as luxury prevails in society, virtue will be in a greater degree considered as only a graceful appendage of wealth, and the tendency of things will be to depart from the republican standard. This is the real disposition of human nature; it is what neither the honorable member nor myself can correct. It is a common misfortunate that awaits our State constitution, as well as all others."[46]

Jefferson found great fault in Hamilton's view of man, for his vision of the one true human nature was one that assumed the better in individuals. Hamilton, perhaps jaded, possessed no qualms in admitting that he believed "a fondness for power is implanted in most men, and it is natural to abuse it when acquired."[47] Hamilton's rising influence, coupled with Jefferson's

[46] Alexander Hamilton, Speech to the New York Ratifying Convention, June 24-25, 1788.
[47] Hamilton, "The Farmer Refuted."

belief that his enemy was a self-interested elitist, proved effective in creating a villain of Hamilton. Jefferson and his allies appeared dedicated to defacing Hamilton's policies and worth as a politician, furious over the economic realities of the nation. While they painted a portrait of the Treasury Secretary as a man bent on crucifying the individuals of the nation, Hamilton's own words do not reveal the same pretensions to unbounded corruption and to ignoring the needs of the nation's citizens.

Hamilton believed that man and government inhabited a peculiar relationship, though it was not quite the one that Jefferson condemned him for. With a token self-interest, Hamilton believed man's drive toward conceit not as a simple issue or right or wrong. Indeed, he was not shy in describing how he saw it best for the nation to forge a fatal flaw into a triumphant strength. In his speech to the New York Ratifying Convention, Hamilton narrated: "Men will pursue their interests. It is as easy to change human nature as to oppose the strong current of the selfish passion. A wise legislator will gently divert the channel and direct it, if possible, to the public good."[48] Hamilton repeatedly espoused his opinions on the functions of the state and its constituents. In the Federalist Papers he stressed the importance on the consent of the governed, believing that "the fabric of American empire ought to rest on the solid basis of the consent of the people."[49] The latter half of this statement appears to be of little consequence to Jefferson in matters of absolving Hamilton's accused monarchism. It is not possible to rely on the excuse that Jefferson had not read these essential words, for he had, in a letter to Madison, belayed his appreciation for the collection of texts. Dated for November of 1788, Jefferson wrote in his letter that the Federalist Papers were "the best commentary on the principles of government which ever was written."[50] Though Madison was a contributor too, the letter was penned at

[48]Hamilton, Speech to the New York Ratifying Convention.

[49]Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No. 22," The Federalist Papers.

[50]Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to James Madison on September 21, 1795," in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Andrew W. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh (Washington DC:

least two years before Jefferson would publicly make a rival out of Hamilton, whom he had likely not met at the time. Hamilton's contributions to the Federalist Papers were not the only instance in which he had expressed similar ideas. During a speech to the New York Ratifying Convention in 1788, he proclaimed that "good constitutions are formed upon a comparison of the liberty of the individual with the strength of the government: if the tone of either be too high, the other will be weakened too much."[51] Aware of the fears that Americans possessed regarding a strong government, in the same speech Hamilton acknowledged the concern and dispelled it by asserting that "the government will reach, in its regular operations, the perfect balance between liberty and power."[52] There is no indication that Jefferson was made aware of this particular speech, but with the prolific nature of Hamilton's writing and the frequency with which he attempts to banish the prejudices against federal authority, it is unlikely that Jefferson could not be aware of Hamilton's views regarding the topic of protecting the liberties of the individual. What is more likely is that Jefferson found cause for alarm in Hamilton's repeated defense of federal power, which he thought suspiciously similar to the monarchist rule of Britain that the nation had only just escaped form. With Hamilton on the offensive, pushing through his economic policies in the early 1790s, Jefferson unveiled his most compelling piece of evidence against the strengthening of federal power. It was the very document that Hamilton had fought for so vehemently in the public arena: the Constitution.

If Jefferson could successfully paint Hamilton as the villain to the Constitution, then he could produce a relatively sound case for stopping the passage of Hamilton's national bank. Whether Jefferson truly believed his assertions or not is unclear, but his public wielding of the document reveals a deep understanding that the precedent of constitutional interpretation had not yet been set. Jefferson knew that this precedent, in which ever direction it

1903)

[51]Hamilton, Speech to New York Ratifying Convention.

[52]Ibid.

would be established, would have long-reaching effects in directing the future of American politics. Hamilton had a similar knowledge about the Constitution's power, enumerating that it is "the standard to which we are to cling. Under its banners, bona fide must we combat our political foes."[53] Although Hamilton's dedication to the Constitution was demonstrated in his passionate defense of the document, Jefferson continued to maintain his suspicions. He found cause for contention in Hamilton's interpretation of the document. Split over the merits of interpretation, Hamilton favored the Constitution as a document intended to live and breathe through a manner of interpretation; it was a founding document that he hoped would be changed and perfected as society demonstrates its need for alteration. Jefferson, leading the opposition, believed the Constitution to be utterly dependent upon the explicitness of its amendments. Of particular importance to Jefferson was the tenth amendment, which limits the powers of Congress to those specifically enumerated within the document. Without this necessary limitation, he feared that the nation would crumble and give way to monarchy. Jefferson expressed these concerns in his official opinion on the constitutionality of the First Bank of the United States, stating that "to take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specifically drawn around the powers of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, not longer susceptible of any definition."[54] Constitutional interpretation was, in Jefferson's eyes, a slippery slope. Written in response to Hamilton's proposal for the establishment of a national bank, Jefferson's published opinion sought to slander Hamilton's policies in any way possible. He launched a virulent attack on the policy, taking particular aim at the constitutionality of his proposal.

As distressed as Jefferson was over Hamilton's broad-constructionist interpretation of the Constitution, he expressed his increased consternation

[53]Alexander Hamilton, Letter to James Bayard April, 1802

[54]Thomas Jefferson, "Official Opinion of Thomas Jefferson in 1791, Upon the Establishment of a National Bank," in *Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives at the First Session of the Twenty-Second Congress*, Vol II (Washington DC: 1831)

when that interpretation was translated into action with the establishment of the First National Bank of the United States. Elevating his argument to the highest arena of political contention, Jefferson turned to the Constitution for backing. Constructing a sophisticated argument, Jefferson relied heavily on the precursory assumption of a strict-constructionist approach, attacking the manner in which Hamilton appeared to be stretching the bounds of congressional power and thus infringing on the rights of the state and of the individual. For guidance Jefferson looked to the tenth amendment, which proclaims that "all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States or to the people."[55] The tenth amendment was Jefferson's "foundation of the Constitution" and the basis of his argument was rooted in Hamilton's gross violation of it.[56] Jefferson's interpretation of the Constitution left no space for the incorporation of a federal bank into the powers of the United States government, and the powers granted to the federal government through Hamilton's bill were not explicitly "delegated to the United States by the Constitution" and were, by extension, expressly prohibited through the tenth amendment.[57] To deviate from the dictates of the amendment even once was "to take possession of a boundless field of power;" Jefferson recognized that the nation stood on the precipice of establishing a dangerous new precedent, one that he feared would have dire consequences for the future of America.[58]

Secondary to his argument against the establishment of the bank, Jefferson unleashes yet another claim directed at Hamilton's unconstitutionality. Jefferson approached the matter by attacking not only the man, but the policy. He raised the issue of constitutionality, asking why the bank should be established by the federal government if it was not necessary to the functioning of the state. Predicting Hamilton's defense of the bill, Jefferson attacks

[55]Tenth Amendment, quoted in Jefferson, "Official Opinion."
[56]Jefferson, "Official Opinion."
[57]Ibid.
[58]Ibid.

the importance of the bank and paints the institution as a trivial improvement to daily life at best - certainly not one worth violating the integrity of the Constitution for. He founded this portion of his argument against the bill's creation of a national mint, a curious choice since Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution provided the federal Congress with the power to coin money. Jefferson agreed that "indeed bank bills may be a more *convenient* vehicle than treasury orders," but insisted that a want for convenience did not equate to necessity, especially in matters which requires constitutional interpretation to find "ground for assuming any non-enumerated power."[59] Anticipating defense of this 'convenience,' Jefferson retorts:

> "It may be said that a bank whose bills would have a currency all over the States would be more convenient than one whose currency is limited to a single State. So it would be still more convenient that there should be a bank, whose bills should have a currency all over the world. But it does not follow from this superior conveniency, that there exists anywhere a power to establish such a bank; or that the world may not go on very well without it."[60]

To improve upon this argument against convenience, Jefferson draws on the example of the state bank in Philadelphia which "does . . . business by their post-notes" through compliance with the United States Treasury and state collectors.[61] A process he deemed effective enough, Jefferson believed that Philadelphia's example would prove thorough in preventing "the existence of that necessity which can honestly justify [the national bank]."[62] In incorporating this example of state banking into his argument, Jefferson was effectively conveying his concern that the creation of a national bank would be an infringement on the business and the rights of the state banks. His

[59]Ibid.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid.
[62]Ibid.

anxiety over the states reflected a similar attention to the individuals of the nation, whose rights he often believed Hamilton to be dismissive of. Jefferson worried that "the bill delivers [Americans] up bound to the national bank" that would limit the rights of the individuals to choose "to employ any other bank," what Jefferson viewed as a distinct violation of not only the individual and the Constitution, but also the freedom afforded to American banks under the practice of a completely laissez-faire economy.[63]

By proposing that the United States establish a national bank, Hamilton was not only breaching the inviolable basis of Jefferson's constitutional interpretation; Jefferson also understood him to be perverting the enumerated powers of Congress for his own cause, specifically those on taxation and the production of currency. Jefferson posited that "to erect a bank and to regulate commerce are very different acts," drawing a parallel between the actions of the federal government and the actions of the individual citizen that he sought to protect.[64] The bank, creating "a subject of commerce in its bills," was no different to Jefferson than the average American "who makes a bushel of wheat, or digs a dollar out of the mines."[65] As a private entity, the bank would have no more ability to regulate commerce than Jefferson's yeoman farmer. Hamilton's bank would thus be in violation of the Constitution under Jefferson's strict-constructionist interpretation, for the powers granted to Congress do "not extend to the internal regulation of the commerce of a state (that is to say of the commerce between citizen and citizen)."[66] To force such an unwarranted expansion of Congressional power would be, Jefferson's eyes, an infringement on the rights of the individual. Hamilton might have instead described the expansion as economically beneficial to the citizens who would be free to reap the benefits of a stable, federally-regulated economy. Yet if Jefferson's suspicions were correct and Hamilton was truly

[63]Ibid.
[64]Ibid.
[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid.

as intent on seizing control of the nation through his influence in Congress, then defending against the expansion of congressional power was absolutely vital to Jefferson's task of protecting the nation.

Just as he opposed a federal currency, Jefferson would find a similar fault too in the levy of taxes for Hamilton's bill. Concern over his rival's assumption policy was echoed in Jefferson's opposition to the bank, fearing that increased political power for Hamilton would be bought using the dollars of the taxpaying American people. The powers of Congress were intended to "provide for the general welfare" of the nation, a function that Jefferson acknowledges and links directly to taxation, and which he enumerated as the sole condition for Congress to levy a tax.[67] To Jefferson, the ability to levy taxes was a potentially dangerous power that Congress possessed, and it was not one that ought to be taken lightly. While he never disputes the function of taxation in improving the nation, he does challenge the grounds upon which Congress' power to impose taxes rests. Because Jefferson's margins for constitutional interpretation were quite narrow, Hamilton's policies appeared to directly attack the integrity of the document. By attempting to improve the general welfare of the American people through any means other than taxation, such as through the establishment of Hamilton's national bank, the exercise of Congressional power without the constitutional limits that restrain it to taxation alone would render Congress as "a distinct and independent power to do any act they please."[68] Even if those acts were for the expressed benefit of the nation, Jefferson opposed to expansion of implied constitutional powers for fear that it would "render all the preceding and subsequent enumerations of power completely useless."[69] Under Jefferson's interpretation, that meant barring the passage of Hamilton's bill, halting the creation of a national bank, and not allowing Congress to interpret their powers beyond what the Constitution explicitly states. Even if Jefferson be-

[67]Ibid.
[68]Ibid.
[69]Ibid.

lieved that Hamilton's bank would have been established for the good of the nation and not simply for a vicious self-interest, or that the bank itself would have evolved to provide something beyond mere conveniences, he may still have felt opposed to the entire affair for fear that the powerful precedent these actions would unleash might someday become perverted, perhaps even sooner rather than later by the politically-savvy Treasury Secretary.

A large discrepancy between these two men on the constitutionality of the First National Bank of the Untied States lies in the nature of the relationship they perceived to exist between government and the Constitution. Where Jefferson saw the bank and congressional interpretation as seriously undermining of the Constitution, Hamilton saw his centralized government actively functioning to fortify the nation. For Hamilton, the bank represented the realization of everything he had hoped the federal government could be: strong, practical, and productive. In Hamilton's eyes, the bank was a gift to the American people that would stabilize their economy and ensure prosperity for the entirety its twenty-year charter. Jefferson saw it as the exact opposite: a detriment to the nation and the catalyst for the corrosion of the Constitution. Little did he expect, but the precedent established in the exercise of Congress's implied powers would pave the way for him during his presidency, during which his strict-constructionist view of the Constitution would waver in favor of securing the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson's strict-constructionism did not automatically force him to assume an aversion to altering the document. On the contrary, Jefferson would demonstrate his advocacy for radical and frequent change, which he saw as an indication that the individuals of the United States were engaged in the civic elements of their nation.[70] Jefferson simply did not approve of that change enacting itself quickly and mercilessly through the interpretations of Congress, favoring instead a process of amendment that would limit the exertion of individual

[70]David N. Mayer, *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 302.

influence, such as that regularly exercised by Hamilton himself.[71]

With contending interpretations over the Constitution itself and the manner through which to effect constitutional change, Jefferson and Hamilton were already at odds. Combined with the growing political threat that Hamilton posed to his rival, Jefferson found a certain villain in his opponent. Hamilton was setting a dangerous precedent that sought not to create a nation bound taut to the word of the Constitution, as Jefferson would wish it, but rather one that found the document's enumerations as a starting point. It was to Hamilton a guide for the growth of a nation that was only in its nascent stage rather than a binding political form of scripture. This interpretation, regardless of Hamilton's intent, must have appeared dangerous to Jefferson who saw his influential opponent creating an avenue through which he could enact any policies he wished to. In Jefferson's mind he was not only against the implementation of an idea that could potentially undermine the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but also against a man who consistently encroached on his political influence and evoked from Jefferson a visceral reaction of dislike. The threat that Hamilton's policies posed must have been immense in Jefferson's eyes: a culmination of his dislike of the man, the policies, and the endangerment of his own political standing. What was ultimately at stake was the future, and Jefferson did not want to place any portion of it within the control of Hamilton, whom he feared would sacrifice the nation as he solely sought political gain for himself. This is not to say that Hamilton's policies would have undermined that future with any certainty, but in Jefferson's vilification of his rival it would seem a logical conclusion of events. To oppose Hamilton was to do right by himself, the Constitution, and the nation.

Hamilton would have seen himself as carrying out a similarly positive, though starkly different, narrative. Jefferson's vehement opposition could be interpreted as a treacherous impediment to the realization of the nation's full

[71]Mayer, *Constitutional Thought*, 296.

potential, equal in magnitude to the threat that Hamilton himself appeared to pose in his rival's eyes. For all of his optimistic visions for the future, Hamilton hoped that the nation would not be hindered by the self-interest that ran rampant throughout its population. After the successful adoption of the Constitution, a politically necessary vehicle to Hamilton's stabilized nation, the nation was in an auspicious state. The future of the United States was still in a precarious position, however, without a stable economy. Hamilton had fought hard to create the centralized federal government that he had envisioned, and through its new powers he sought to establish a precedent of functionality and strength for the nation. Concerned with the emergent government, the nation as an entity, and with the ability of the nation to continue on despite human corruption, Hamilton's economic policies were crafted in the manner that he believed most suited for the security of the nation.

As these two men were working against each other, they were also working for a common goal. Though each was attempting to edge the nation toward a prosperous future, the gulf dividing their methods and beliefs were immense. For all of Jefferson's efforts, there appeared to be an equal push from the industrial Hamilton to foil his hard-fought progress toward an agrarian American future.These conflicting visions of the future were rooted in the rivalry rather than the source of it. Jefferson and Hamilton certainly sought to separate themselves publicly in ideas and methods, and this push was prompted by deeply-held feelings of personal contempt. For Hamilton, feelings of rivalry were no doubt influenced by the intense opposition from Jefferson, who seemed against him at every turn. Jefferson's feelings were shaded by a multitude of influences which found themselves expressed in his political actions against his rival. In many ways, Hamilton was the perfect enemy. He was that rare figure whom Jefferson could feel simultaneous respect and loathing toward. For all of Hamilton's admirable intellect and the competitive spirit that he inspired within Jefferson, there was still a great deal of animosity

that he evoked from his opponent. As the author of the Declaration of Independence and a staunch defender of liberty from behind the pen, Jefferson had a wealth of personal reasons to be deeply opposed to Hamilton, who drew often on the British example when crafting his policies. The promotion of an economic structure built upon British influence may have appeared as a manner through which America's new foundation of independence could be undermined by the empire they had recently broken from. Hamilton's own arrogance and disregard for Jefferson might have contributed to the growing distance between the two founders, which was furthered by their match in intellect but disconnect in political philosophy. The political discord itself was rooted within personal antagonism, breeding what became the public disagreements on the nature of government and economics. Fueled by the personal aspects of the disagreement, the rivalry became highly public when it was elevated to the political arena with disputes regarding the merits of Hamilton's economic policy, but it never lost its distinctly personal influences. Jefferson saw Hamilton's readiness to institute an economic policy that acknowledged and played on endemic human self-interest as an indication that Hamilton too was acting solely for self gain.

To Jefferson it seemed that his rival was, although high on that natural aristocracy due to his intellect, manipulating the laws the Constitution for his own benefit. This suspicion no doubt rose from Jefferson's personal impressions of Hamilton, who was never eager to accept Jefferson's opinions on his economic policy. With the battle regarding the constitutionality of Hamilton's proposals, Jefferson appeared to be more concerned with limiting Hamilton's political power than he was worried about government intrusion, which simply supported his argument against Hamilton's sprawling influence. Allowing Congress to pass the economic policies would set a precedent that would not only allow for avenues to change other than constitutional amendment, but a precedent that would also allow for Hamilton to push through more of his proposals and garner far more political support than Jefferson

wished him to. Given Hamilton's indisputable belief in the inherently self-interested nature of man, Jefferson had cause for concern that Hamilton's own self-interest was the driving force behind his political crusades. Even if this was not Hamilton's intention, the powerful concoction of influential personal factors meant that little could be done to sway Jefferson's opinion of his opponent. The evidence from Hamilton and Jefferson themselves indicate that this great rivalry, one that has grown to define an era, was never based solely in public political matters. Personal opinion and prejudice drove a wedge between these two founders, who elevated a dispute rooted in private disagreement all the way up to two of the most public arenas: Congress and print. This rivalry that would come to define a nation with its conflicting visions of American prosperity, its varying positions on constitutional interpretation, and its warring founders, would remain a deeply personal matter between Hamilton and Jefferson. For all that they have been built up throughout history as larger-than-life figures and beacons of inspiration, these two men were, at the very core of it all, human.

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